

Fear for Lithuania Has U.S. Emigrés on the Watch

By WILLIAM E. SCHMIDT
Special to The New York Times

CHICAGO, March 26 — For several days now, some of the telefax machines that had been relaying a steady stream of messages to Chicago from Lithuania have been silent. Overseas telephone calls placed to Vilnius don't always go through, even after hours of trying.

As the Soviet Government increases its pressure on his native land, Liutias Mockunas says he is growing more and more apprehensive. "The phones and fax lines are the next to go, I fear," he said, sitting in the small restaurant he owns on Chicago's southwest side. "And soon, we could be right back in the Brezhnev era."

Numbering an estimated 100,000, Chicago's Lithuanian-Americans are the nation's largest group of Lithuanian émigrés. For more than a year, they have reveled in the liberalization introduced by President Mikhail S. Gorbachev. By courier and in person, they have carried computers, telefax machines, paper, copying equipment, books and magazines back to their native land, helping supply the independence movement there with the means to spread its message.

As Soviet military vehicles moved through the streets of Vilnius over the last several days, Lithuanian-Americans felt both anxiety and anger: anxiety that Moscow might use force to impose its will, and anger that President Bush is not doing more to support the forces of democracy inside Lithuania. [The Lithuanian-Americans were interviewed before reports of a Soviet battle with army deserters in Vilnius.]

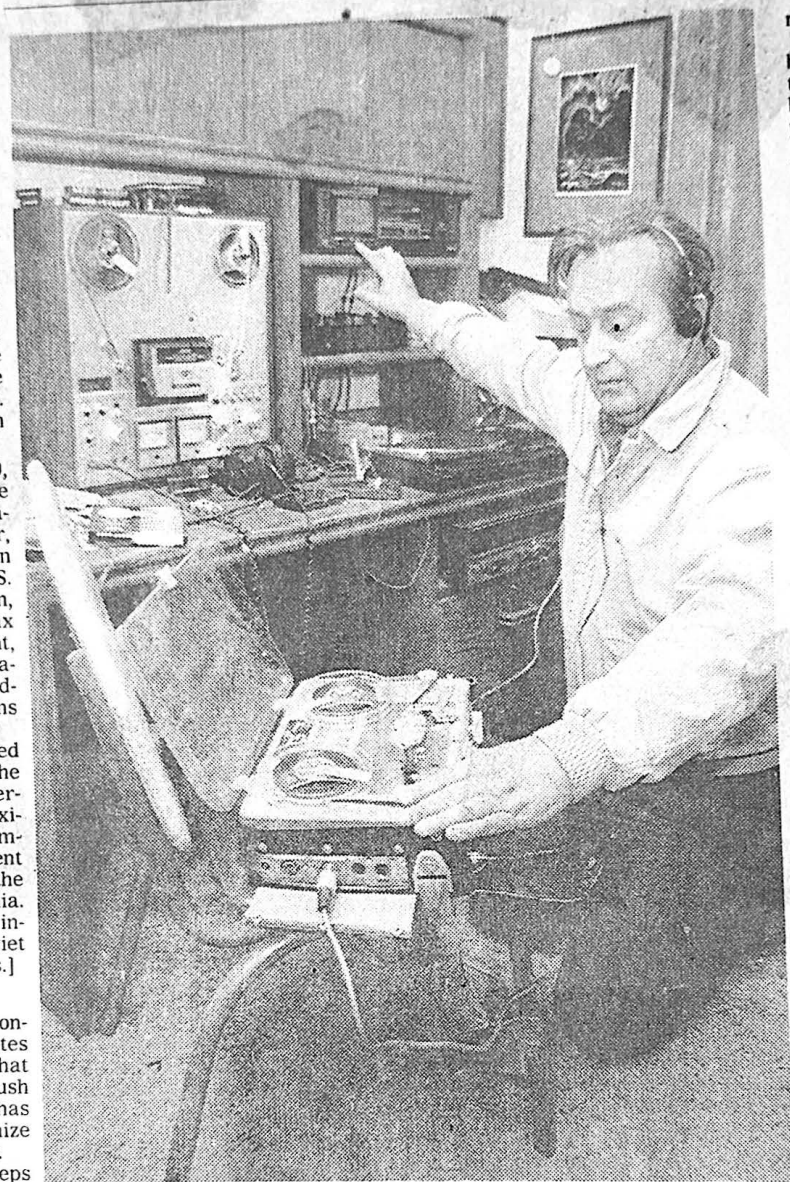
Call for U.S. Recognition

On Saturday, more than 500 demonstrators from across the United States converged on Washington to drive that message home. They urged the Bush Administration to do what it so far has refused to do — officially recognize Lithuania as an independent country.

Standing on the snow-covered steps of the Lincoln Memorial, where protesters kept a cold vigil on Saturday evening, Theresa Kalvaitis said she feared a Soviet version of the crackdown last summer in Tiananmen Square, when the Chinese Government used force to smash pro-democracy protests. "The tanks are going to roll in and no one is going to notice," predicted Ms. Kalvaitis, who traveled to the rally in Washington from Euclid, Ohio.

In Chicago, Representative Richard J. Durbin, a Democrat from west central Illinois, appeared Sunday before a meeting of 200 Lithuanian-Americans and declared in Lithuanian, to loud applause, "Lithuania is already free."

The son of a Lithuanian émigré, Mr. Durbin was one of the authors of a



The New York Times/Jonathan Kirn

Anxiety is growing for Lithuanian-Americans like Tolius Slutas as the Soviet Government increases its pressure on their homeland. He recently prepared tapes for "The Lithuanian-American Hour," the Chicago radio program he broadcasts from his electronics store.

House resolution calling on the United States Government to exchange ambassadors with the government in Vilnius. "At this moment, as Soviet armor rolls through the streets of Vilnius, the Lithuanian people wait for word that we have not forgotten or forsaken their cause," he said.

On Saturday evening, beneath the soaring Gothic roof of St. George's Roman Catholic Church, Chicago's oldest Lithuanian congregation, more

than 500 worshipers gathered to celebrate a mass for a free Lithuania. The parishioners, some wearing Lithuanian red, green and yellow flags of their homeland, bowed their heads as the Rev. Anthony Markus urged them to flood the church with prayers for Lithuania.

"Like David before Goliath, we need to pray," Father Markus said. "We need to be truly with them in heart and in spiritual ways. For God can be

moved. And man sometimes can be."

At the back of Patria, a Lithuania bookstore and gift shop, amid the clutter of the audio equipment he uses to broadcast his weekly Chicago radio program, "The Lithuanian-American Hour," Tolius Slutas jumped as he heard his telefax machine click on.

"Here comes a message, at last," he said, hovering over the machine. A moment later, the line broke and machine shut off. Although Mr. Slutas has successfully send some messages overseas, including copies of recent newspaper stories about Lithuania, he has received nothing for a week.

An Emigré Switchboard

Mr. Slutas and his wife, Fran, own the shop, which is on Chicago's southwest side. For nearly a year, they have operated as a kind of local switchboard for news from abroad. Mrs. Slutas, who is a host of the radio program along with her husband, said she had recently taken two fax machines to the Lithuanian capital for use by Sajudis, the umbrella movement that has led the fight for independence.

Other Lithuanian-Americans seft a personal computer and desktop publishing system, which Sajudis now uses to turn out its newspaper, "Atgimimas," which means, "Rebirth."

"Now we are not sure what to do," said Mr. Slutas, who fled Lithuania as a boy, during World War II.

Mrs. Slutas said she tried to be optimistic. "I think that Gorbachev has a soft heart, that he will not resort to bloodshed," she said. "He has promised, after all, not to use force."

Her husband sighed: "But this we have heard before — from Stalin."

Year of Increasing Freedom

Across the street, at the Nida Restaurant, Mr. Mockunas marveled at how much things have improved in the Baltic republic over the last year. The editor and publisher of a monthly Lithuanian magazine called "Horizons," he described how the Government had eased censorship.

Mr. Mockunas said he had helped organize a donation of \$50,000 worth of paper and equipment that enabled a printer in Vilnius to publish an independent history of Lithuania, one of the first ever permitted. He also edited a book, published only a few months ago in Lithuania, of essays by Lithuanian writers in exile.

But Mr. Mockunas has feared that a crackdown might be beginning. Rimvydas Valatka, a prominent dissident writer in Vilnius, promised him 10 days ago that he would send him an essay by telefax for publication in his Chicago newsletter. Mr. Mockunas said his fax machine has been silent ever since.

He is still waiting for the essay, entitled, "On the road to independence, it is raining."